

Good Friday - April 15

(And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten pounds!') 'I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and slaughter them in my presence.'" After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here.

John 19:25b-30 (NRSV)

In my few years of practice in ministry, I have learned that even in the imminence of a person's death God surrounds us. I have witnessed holiness and even wholeness as a person was going to let go of this earthly life and breathe their last. But I never expected that I would experience an enveloping, loving, and fierce presence of God when my brother was dying. As my brother and my whole family were in Russia, I knew in my spirit that I needed to fly out there and be with all of them. As I was flying out I was guided by the comforting and still presence of God and as the distance to my hometown of Samara was getting shorter and shorter, I was giving my mom instructions to gather my brother's ex-wife and his sons and my dad. When I arrived I had the most beautiful conversation with my brother and he gave me the most beautiful brotherly kiss. Then I gathered everyone around my brother. We encircled him in our love and care and as I was instructing my family how we were going to pray, I said that we would pray the Lord's Prayer and the Serenity Prayer. And as I was about to start, Igor started us off with praying the Lord's Prayer. In all of my years with my brother, faith and prayer was not something that he talked about and he even made fun of my faith and the vocation that I chose sometimes. But there he was leading his family in prayer. After this Igor became very ill and was taken into the hospital where he spent his last three days on Earth. In those three days, Igor constantly talked to God and prayed. God was present in all these beautiful circumstances surrounding his passing. He got to see his sister and give her a last kiss. He was able to reconcile with his wife. His younger son, Rusty was baptized just a few hours before Igor passed. And most importantly, Igor reconciled with God. In the midst of suffering and pain, God's presence and love surrounded him and us all. Igor died peacefully in his sleep as Jesus came to take him to his eternal home.

As we observe Good Friday today, we are reminded of Jesus' death and how painful it must have been for him and his family as he was dying on the cross. This is a time of mourning and grief, a time when we ponder the limitations that we have as humans, including our own death. Yet we trust that because of Jesus' death, we can experience God's love and God's peace in any circumstances of our life. Because of Jesus' death, we are surrounded by God's everlasting love that will lead us home one day.

Pastor Katya

Prayer: O Holy God, full of love and brilliant light, today we surrender to You, we surrender our hearts and our lives. We ask that You grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.